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SUBJECT: KORDOFAN REBEL GROUP MERGES WITH JEM

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: A new Kordofan rebel group led by a well-known former brigadier general in the Sudanese Armed Forces, Ibrahim Abu Rannat, has recently merged with the Justice and Equality Movement. This unification with "The Sons of Kordofan Alliance" (SKA) supports JEM's goal of spreading the Darfur conflict into neighboring states, and may provide arms, training, and logistical support to a growing Kordofan insurgency. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Brigadier General Ibrahim AbuRannat, military commander of the Sons of Kordofan Alliance (SKA), told EmbOff on January 14 that his movement has united with the Justice and Equality Movement. AbuRannat said that JEM's rejection of the Government of Sudan and the practical benefits that this alliance will provide (e.g. training, arms, and material support) make it an attractive union. Abu Rannat dismissed that he was part of another Kordofan rebel movement, the Kordofan Alliance for Development (KAD) (see below), stating that this movement is cowardly, ineffective, and "only wasting time."

¶3. (SBU) In a January 16 conversation with emboff, Khattab Widaa, the secretary of JEM's social services committee, confirmed that Abu Rannat had joined forces with JEM and that Khalil Ibrahim had named Abu Rannat a deputy leader of JEM.

¶4. (U) JEM websites (www.sudanjem.com) and Sudanese daily papers also carried a statement from Abu Rannat declaring the merger of SKA with JEM:

- "The Military wing of SKA hereby declares its official merger with the Sudanese Justice and Equality Movement forces... This decision has come as a result of JEM's national orientation and objectives, and its clear solution for Sudan's chronic problems. Long consultations, continued for months, between the two movements, have preceded this decision, and successfully concluded in transferring SKA's military forces to JEM territories in the field. The SKA political leaders inside Sudan and in exile have also helped make this decision."

- "The leaders of SKA have affirmed that the problem of the region and the whole country will not be solved by Khartoum's sweet words and false promises. The merger of SKA into JEM is one step towards the unification of the marginalized to achieve their legitimate rights. This declaration confirms the commitment of all members of SKA to the constitution, activities, and objectives of JEM."

HISTORY OF KORDOFAN REBELS

¶5. (U) Since the start of the conflict in Darfur, neighboring Kordofan has produced few indigenous rebel groups. One of the first, Shahama, was led by Musa Hammada, a native of the Misseriya tribe from West Kordofan and a former commander in the Sudanese Popular Defense Force. In 2003, Hammada led his Shahama movement against the Sudanese Armed Forces in Kordofan. Later in 2003, government forces attacked Hammada's forces, killed him, and largely dismantled Shahama.

¶ 6. (U) In 2006, the Kordofan Alliance for Development (KAD) emerged as another resistance movement. Although KAD has a military wing, it has not yet attacked GoS forces. Since its inception, KAD has focused on chartering political statements, organizing strikes, and issuing formal criticism against the GoS. On January 15, local press reported that the General Secretary and military commander of KAD, Mr. Mohamed Al Belail Issa, called the merger between JEM and SKA inappropriate, as the people, culture, and overall situation in Kordofan is different from that in Darfur.

¶ 7. (U) In 2007, Abu Rannat appears to have been in regular contact with KAD leaders and may have briefly joined the movement. Although the relationship between KAD and Abu Rannat during this time period remains unclear, Abu Rannat now rejects KAD as an organization and subsequently formed his own movement, the Sons of Kordofan Alliance. With its merger to JEM, it is not clear whether KSA will continue to use its own name, or whether it will be fully incorporated into JEM.

¶ 8. (SBU) The acting Colonel of the Sudanese Police in Nahud, Kordofan, Ibrahim Abdalla Mohamed, told emboff on January 16 that the Sudanese Armed Force units have been put on alert in Nahud, El-Obeid, and Ghebeish following the SKA-JEM merger. According to Mohamed, Abu Rannat is a popular leader, and the GoS's failure to pay military pensions have helped his recruitment efforts. Despite Abu Rannat's popularity, Mohamed stated his belief that JEM will not succeed in stirring conflict in Kordofan as its people do not want to follow the path of Darfur. He also stated that disgruntled individuals and movements in Kordofan, such as KAD, are starting to work with the Government of Sudan. He predicted that Khartoum will soon award development projects to cooperative areas and movements such as KAD and named the Ghebeish-Nahud-El-Obeid road as one likely project.

¶ 9. (SBU) Comment: JEM has distorted and exaggerated information in the past and probably is using this alliance with SKA for self-promotion. Nonetheless, this does fit into JEM's overall strategy of spreading violence from Darfur into Kordofan. Although JEM attacks in Kordofan have been infrequent, they have been directed towards high profile targets such as oil fields and sometimes they have resulted in the great loss of life (as in the case of the August 29 Wad Banda attack which killed 41 reserve police/militia). Compared to other Darfur rebel groups, JEM has a sophisticated communications strategy with a website, frequent press releases, and continuous interaction with the local and international press.

¶ 10. (SBU) Comment continued: Even if the amount of SKA's troops or the size of its arsenal is small, JEM has gained a respected, experienced, and knowledgeable military commander in Abu Rannat. The Government of Sudan appears to recognize that this represents an elevated threat to Kordofan and has responded quickly. According to sources in Kordofan, Khartoum has reportedly put SAF troops and Kordofan police on alert, encouraged division between Kordofan opposition movements, and, with a new development program, appears ready to buy-out natural allies of JEM and Abu Rannat, a strategy the GOS has used effectively in other conflicts. END COMMENT.

¶ 11. (SBU) BIO NOTE: Ibrahim Abu Rannat is a former brigadier general who was dismissed or possibly pressured out of the Sudanese Armed Forces in approximately 2000 after he was perceived not to be sufficiently loyal to the Bashir regime. A native of Nahud in western North Kordofan state, AbuRannat has the reputation of being an effective and leader who knows Kordofan and Darfur well. He is rumored to have served as a consultant to Darfur rebel movements.

FERNANDEZ